

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

20 October 1962

SUBJECT: SNIE 11-19-62: MAJOR CONSEQUENCES OF CERTAIN US COURSES OF ACTION ON CUBA

THE PROBLEM

To estimate the major consequences of certain US courses of action with respect to Cuba

THE ESTIMATE

STATUS OF SOVIET MILITARY BUILDUP IN CUBA

1. Firm evidence indicates the presence in Cuba of four IRBM and two ICBM launch sites in various stages of construction and organized into at least three regiments. Of these, two regiments of eight launchers each are mobile and designed to launch IRBMs with a range of about 1,100 n.m., while one regiment of eight fixed launchers may be designed for ICBMs with a range of about 2,200 n.m.

SECRET COPY

Approved for Release
Date 15 April 1975

2. The 16 launchers for 1,100 n.m. MRBMs must be considered operational now. Four of the fixed launchers for the 2,200 n.m. IRBMs could probably become operational within the next six weeks. The other four would become operational in 8 to 10 weeks.

The construction of at least one probable nuclear storage facility is a strong indication of the Soviet intent to provide nuclear warheads. In any case, it is prudent to assume that when the missiles are otherwise operational, nuclear warheads will be available. These could be brought in by air, submarine, or surface ship.

3. We estimate that operational MRBM missiles can be fired in eight hours or less after a decision to launch, depending on the condition of readiness. After the IRBM sites are completed and missiles are on launcher, a state of readiness of five hours may be maintained. Both systems are believed to be provided with two missiles per launcher, providing a refire capability from each launcher after about four to six additional hours for the MRBMs and six to eight hours for the IRBMs.

4. It is possible that further evidence will uncover additional launch sites which are presently undetected, but the extent of our coverage leads us to believe that such evidence would not drastically

increase the total now deployed. On the other hand, new deployments could be started at any time.

5. The inventory of other major Soviet weapons now identified in Cuba includes:

- a. 22 IL-28 jet light bombers, of which one is assembled and three others have been uncrated;
- b. 39 MIG-21 jet fighters, of which 35 are assembled and four are still crates, and 62 other jet fighters of less advanced types;
- c. 24 SA-2 sites, of which 16 are believed to be individually operational with some missiles on launcher;
- d. 3 cruise missile sites for coastal defense, of which 2 are now operational;
- e. 12 Soviet cruise missile patrol boats, all probably operational or nearly so.

6. Cuban-based MRBMs and IRBMs with nuclear warheads would augment the present limited Soviet ICBM capability by virtue of their ability to strike at similar types of targets with warheads of generally similar yields. In the near future, therefore, Soviet gross capabilities for initial attack on US military and civilian targets can be increased considerably by Cuban-based missiles. However, the deployment of these missiles in Cuba will probably not, in the Soviet judgment, insure destruction of the US second strike capability to a degree which would

eliminate an unacceptably heavy retaliatory attack on the USSR. If the missile buildup in Cuba continues, the Soviet capability to blunt a retaliatory attack will be progressively enhanced.

PURPOSE OF SOVIET BUILDUP

7. A major Soviet objective in their military buildup in Cuba is to demonstrate that the world balance of forces has shifted so far in their favor that the US can no longer prevent the advance of Soviet offensive power even into its own hemisphere. In this connection they assume, of course, that these deployments sooner or later will become publicly known. At the same time, they expect their missile forces in Cuba to make an important contribution to their total strategic capability vis-a-vis the US.

8. Consequently, it is unlikely that the USSR is installing these missiles primarily in order to use them in bargaining for US concessions elsewhere. Moreover, the public withdrawal of Soviet missiles from Cuba would create serious problems in the USSR's relations with Castro; it would cast doubt on the firmness of the Soviet intention to protect the Castro regime and perhaps on their commitments elsewhere.

US ACQUIESCENCE IN THE BUILDUP

9. If the US acquiesces to the presence of strategic missiles in Cuba, we believe that the Soviets will continue the buildup. We have no basis for estimating the force level which they would wish to reach, but it seems entirely clear now that they are going well beyond a token capability.

10. This course of US action would provide strong encouragement to Communists, pro-Communists, and the more anti-American sectors of opinion in Latin America. We believe that, especially over the long run, there would be loss of confidence in US power and determination and a serious decline of US influence, particularly in Latin America. Should any additional Latin American government fall to the Communists the Soviets would feel free to establish bases in the country in question if they chose. A major immediate consequence would be that the Soviets would probably estimate lower risks in pressing the US hard in other confrontations, such as Berlin.

EFFECT OF WARNING

11. If the US confronts Khrushchev with its knowledge of the MRBM deployment and presses for a withdrawal, we do not believe the Soviets would halt the deployment. Instead, they would propose negotiations on the general question of foreign bases, claiming equal right to establish Soviet bases and assuring the US of tight control over the missiles.

They would probably link Cuba with the Berlin situation and emphasize their patience and preference for negotiations, implying that Berlin was held hostage to US actions in Cuba.

12. There is some slight chance that a warning to Castro might make a difference, since the Soviets could regard this as a chance to stand aside, but it also would give time for offers to negotiate, continued buildup, and counterpressures, and we think the result in the end would be the same.

13. Any warning would of course degrade the element of surprise in a subsequent US attack.

A US BLOCKADE

14. Two basic modes of blockade could be considered: total and selective. We believe that even under a total blockade individual aircraft and submarines might get through to deliver vital military items, e.g., nuclear warheads. Even the most severe blockade would not deprive the Soviets of the use of missiles already in Cuba for a nuclear strike on the US.

15. Under any form of blockade, the Soviets would concentrate on political exploitation, especially in the UN. They might risk violent encounters in attempts to penetrate the blockade, but they would not resort to major force in the area of Cuba or forceful retaliation elsewhere,

at least initially. If US enforcement of the blockade involved use of force by the US, the Soviets might respond on an equivalent level, but would seek to avoid escalation.

16. Thus any blockade situation would place the Soviets under no immediate pressure to choose a response with force. They could rely on political means to compel the US to desist, and reserve a resort to force until the US had actually used force. They would estimate that the inherent difficulties of enforcing the blockade and the generally adverse reactions, including those of US allies to it, would result in enormous pressures on the US to desist. They could heighten those pressures by threatening retaliation in Berlin or actually undertaking major harassments on the access routes, which could become tantamount to a blockade, and would probably do so at some stage.

17. We do not believe that even a severe blockade, of itself, would bring down the Cuban regime. Castro would tighten internal security and, unless action against the regime subsequently developed on Cuban soil, the Cuban population would be increasingly reluctant to oppose the regime. Direct action would still be required to bring down the Castro regime.

SOVIET REACTION TO USE OF MILITARY FORCE

18. In the case of US use of force against Cuban territory, the likelihood of a Soviet response by force, either locally or for retaliation elsewhere, would be greater than in the case of blockade. The

Soviets would be placed automatically under great pressure to respond in ways which, if they could not save Cuba, would inflict an offsetting injury to US interests. This would be true whether the action was limited to an effort to neutralize the strategic missiles, or these missiles plus airfields, surface-to-air missile sites, or cruise missile sites, or in fact an outright invasion designed to destroy the Castro regime.

19. In reaction to any of the various forms of US action, the Soviets would be surprised and probably alarmed, since they appear to have estimated that the US would probably not take military action in the face of Soviet warnings of the danger of nuclear war. They would recognize that US military action posed a major challenge to the prestige of the USSR. We must of course recognize the possibility that the Soviets, under pressure to respond, would again miscalculate and respond in a way which, through a series of actions and reactions, could escalate to general war.

20. On the other hand, the Soviets have no public treaty with Cuba and have not acknowledged that Soviet bases are on the island. This situation provides them with a pretext for treating US military action against Cuba as an affair which does not directly involve them, and thereby avoiding the risks of a strong response. We do not believe that the USSR would attack the US, either from Soviet bases or with its missiles in Cuba, even if the latter were operational and not put out of action before they could be readied for firing.

21. Since the USSR would almost certainly not resort to general war and could not hope to prevail locally, we believe that the Soviets would consider retaliatory actions outside Cuba. The timing and selection of such moves would depend heavily upon the immediate context of events and the USSR's appreciation of US attitudes. The most likely location for broad retaliation outside Cuba appears to be Berlin. They would probably react here with major harassments, interruptions of access to the city or even a blockade, with or without the signing of a separate peace treaty. Retaliation against some US installation overseas is possible but in our view unlikely.

22. We believe that there would probably be a difference between Soviet reaction to all-out invasion and Soviet reaction to more limited US use of force against selected objectives in Cuba. We believe that the Soviets would be somewhat less likely to retaliate with military force in areas outside Cuba in response to speedy, effective invasion than in response to more limited forms of military action against Cuba. We recognize that such an estimate cannot be made with very great assurance and do not rule out the possibility of Soviet retaliation outside Cuba in case of invasion. But we believe that a rapid occupation of Cuba would be more likely to make the Soviets pause in opening new theaters of conflict than limited action or action which drags out.

23. Finally, we believe that, whatever course of retaliation the USSR elected, the Soviet leaders would not deliberately initiate general

var or take military measures, which in their calculation, would run grave risks of general war.